

46
DECLASSIFIED

PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 22, 2004

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

RS/R FILES

Attention *Mrs. Mullett*
Keep this study together.

13263

September 2, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Report on Efforts in Connection with
Hijacked TWA Aircraft

Our intensive efforts over the Labor Day weekend under the leadership of Under Secretary Johnson have begun to pay off. All of the passengers are now out of Syria, except two remaining Israeli male passengers. We have been in close and constant touch both with the Israelis and TWA officials throughout, and I believe the crisis atmosphere over the hijacking has eased. In particular this seems so in connection with the confrontation between TWA and the Israelis, although the company is not yet out of the woods. We will continue our efforts, by all feasible means, to help assure the release of the two remaining Israelis, though our assessment is that this process is likely to be protracted as was the case a year ago in securing the release of male Israeli passengers of an El-Al aircraft hijacked to Algeria. In particular, the Italian Government has played a major role and can be expected to be the principal focus in future efforts.

The current effort is primarily in the hands of TWA President Wiser who is now in Damascus discussing with the Syrians the question of release of the remaining two Israeli nationals and the repair and repatriation of the aircraft. In the past several days I have consulted several times with TWA Chairman, Mr. Tillinghast,

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GROUP 3

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2
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William P. Rogers
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BY S/S: CMS

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whose cooperation has been extremely helpful to us throughout. In many ways this has been a classic example of cooperation between government and the private sector in our mutual interests. We hope to have some report from Wiser over the next forty-eight hours. In the meantime, both he and the pilot remain in Damascus. As part of our effort to mobilize international support which helped to achieve the release of the passengers we: (a) encouraged many governments with influence in Damascus to make their views known to Syrian authorities; (b) asked the Soviets to intervene with the Syrians and have word from them that our views have been conveyed (TASS reports have implied criticism of the hijacking); (c) convened an emergency session of the special committee of ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) which we believe will result in a further communication by that organization to the Syrians; (d) have been in touch with the Director General of IATA, Knut Hammaraskjold, to mobilize the resources of that organization; and (e) are convening a meeting of the NATO Council in order to encourage our European allies to keep up the momentum on this matter.

In addition, we have made an intensive study of the possibility of organizing a broad boycott by the principal carriers using the new Damascus airport as a means of bringing further pressure, but regrettably have concluded this is not likely to prove a feasible course. However, we intend to pursue consultations with a number of other countries on the assumption that the threat of considering such a boycott may have a salutary effect in Damascus. We also have available a contingency plan for moving into the United Nations Security Council, though we are reluctant to pursue this course while other efforts through the TWA President and through the Italians are going forward, particularly since we do not feel the Council's composition is such that the kind of positive action we would want would result. We will keep this latter course under current review.

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3

According to press reports, two representatives of the International Committee for the Red Cross arrived in Damascus on September 1. We have no official confirmation of either their arrival or the role they may play, but the speculation in the press is that they may act as intermediaries to organize an exchange of the two Israelis for Syrian prisoners held by Israel.



William P. Rogers

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